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O.O. Howard Collection

INDIAN SIEGES,

I. SIEGE OF DETROIT - PONTIAC. PART I.

The Simple Story by O.O.Howard, Major-General,U.S.Army

Dear Boys:-

I recently paid a visit to Detroit, Michigan; after unaccountable delays I got there in time for an important meeting through the generous benevolence of Canadian railroad men. It is a great city, having at last count, made by United States officers, about 300,000 people. It is a city spread out between the great lakes, Huron and Erie; beautiful for situation and charming in itself,- rather too level, I ween, for mountaineers.

One of your number, Arthur C----- said that he would like to have me tell the boys something about the great Indian siege that took place long ago at Detroit, and about the great Indian Chieftain Pontiac, who made the siege. All right, Arthur, let us begin by putting in a few words concerning the planting of the first fort and naming the grand Strait Détroit (Detroit), from which the city soon after took its name. Can you tell me who did this?

"No, sir, I do not think I saw it in my history,- history seems to have no limits."

I read that Louis the XIV., probably the most renowned of all the French kings, always took a remarkable interest in what he called "New France", so he sent colonists to this side of the Atlantic, some of whom settled above and near the St. Lawrence. The King was very friendly to a young nobleman whose name was La Motte Cadillac, and he wanted him to come over to America and take possession of about all the Atlantic seaport, and the country back as far as the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, and hold the possession by small forts. He promised Cadillac, a little later called Lord Cadillac, that he would give him 500 French settlers and six companies of regular soldiers for his garrison if he would put

a good fort and settlement between Lake Huron and Lake Erie on the west side of the connecting river.

The young Lord had hardly reached Quebec when the great Governor of New France, Frontinac, the white colonists, and the Indians round about, raised against him a fierce opposition. At last, however, he succeeded in 1701 in making near the river the fort which he named Ponchartrain, with outside palisades thirty feet high all around; but the only Frenchmen he was able to muster to live in and near it, and to defend the fort, were fifty civilians and fifty soldiers. The site was superb, but the woods around it were endless.

Cadillac, full of enthusiasm for French expansion, planted a good many other French forts along the Ohio, the Illinois, and way down to near the mouth of the Mississippi. Sometimes he was in Maine. He there took possession of Mt. Desert, and another place on the Maine Coast called Bouagnat, and the King made him "Lord of Bouagnat and Mt. Desert." The general court of Massachusetts in 1789 confirmed the title ~~to his grand-daughter, Madame Gregoire~~, of that part of Mt.Desert that was not already given away to others, to his grand-daughter Madame Gregoire.

The City of Detroit did not grow very fast after it was planted, for in 1760 there were only about 2500 people at the fort and scattered up and down for a score of miles thereabouts. The Fort itself was not a very strong one. It was made as many of those frontier forts were, in the form of a square, and had within the square not to exceed 100 buildings, houses, barracks, stables and all. The most of the inhabitants outside had come from Canada and were of French extraction, all speaking the French language. The great portion of the country far and near was still covered with forests through which the enterprising fur traders and "voyageurs" had to go to carry on their trade with the Indians, and with the more distant trading posts.

The settlers about the Fort had at this time a very pleasant open prairie lying along the river, and the Indians of the five nations always had some of their wigwams and villages near this opening. The five nations, usually called in history the Iroquois, were the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onandagas, Cayugas, and the Senecas. These nations were subdivided into tribes and families. They seldom had any locality where they permanently resided, yet the Iroquois nations managed to occupy all the country north and south of the St. Lawrence and as far east as the Hudson River,- some of them have been in New York State at all times till today,- in places that are now named for their nations, their tribes, or their families.

Near this Detroit settlement, on the west bank of the river, were found at the time of the siege the lodges of the Potawatamies. Opposite them on the other side were the Wyandots, and the Ottawas held the open prairie and islands for a few miles above. These, including the Ojibways, were only tribes part and parcel of the Seneca Nation.

Arthur asks me, "Who commanded the Fort just before and at the time of the great siege?"

Major Gladwyn, a British officer. I have not been able to find his Christian name in our records. The officers of the Colonial period always called him Major Gladwyn. I think it is a pretty name and quite descriptive of his character. He was cautious and fearless, yet very pleasant in peace-times in dealing with the French, the English and the Indians.

The second in command was Major Robert Rogers. He came before Gladwyn. The latter part of November, 1760, he brought to the garrison his 200 rangers. Pontiac had given him protection against an Indian attack on his approach, and it was Major Rogers who sent out the French

garrison and had them lay down their arms, and at the same time he sent the British flag to the top of the flag staff. It was after this that Major Gladwyn had come, and, being the senior, assumed command - Rogers was away at Fort Niagara during the first part of the siege.

Arthur- "Now, General, can you tell us who was Pontiac?"

The more I study the character and doings of Pontiac the more thoroughly satisfied I am that English writers have not done him justice. I think he was very much such a man as Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces, an Indian who had larger capacity born in him,- as capacity always is,- and an executive ability that very few leaders, English, French or American, ever excelled. He was born near the Ottawa River, Canada, 1720. His mother was an Ojibway, and his father in some way connected with the Chieftainship of the Ottawa and the Potawatamie tribes, so that as soon as Pontiac was old enough he became the hereditary Chief of those three tribes of the Seneca Nation. When quite young he so identified himself with the "Touats" or dreamers, which were found in every tribe, as to be looked upon as their leader; his religious superstitions cemented the tribes in action for war or peace. From his tremendous energy his qualities were recognized by the French commanders when they were attacked at Detroit in 1746. We find him with little doubt of the fact, leading the Ottawas against Braddock, the famous British General who with young Colonel Washington was defeated in the Pennsylvania forests in 1755.

Looked up to as he was by all Indians and by the French who had dealings with him, still he lived modestly on an island a few miles above Detroit in a roomy cabin roughly constructed of saplings and bark. Here is where he planned his campaign which took in all the country from the great lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Maine to the Mississippi. Parkman says of him, after stating some of his fiercer

qualities, "yet his faults were the faults of his race; and they cannot eclipse his nobler qualities, the great powers and heroic virtues of his mind."

We must remember that at this time the great wars between the English and French had ceased and the English had conquered, but it took quite a length of time for the news of the great change to be communicated to all the distant garrisons of the west. As fast as English troops could be sent, the French garrisons were relieved and permitted to disband or return home; and after that the Union Jack, unfurled to the breeze, was everywhere seen.

At first Pontiac, whose people had fought both for and against the French, was much surprised when Major Rogers informed him at Cleveland on Lake Erie, that the English had conquered and that the Union Jack would hereafter take the place of the French tri-color throughout all the country occupied by the Iroquois.

After carefully considering the change Pontiac at first decided to throw in all his influence and that of his followers with the English, but he soon missed the flattering consideration that he had had with the French. Then the English officers took no pains to keep his good will, and the Indians were everywhere treated in precisely the opposite way to that by the French. No more dances with the whites, no more presents on holidays, almost no intermarriages. A little tact shown at that time by Gen. Jeffreys Amherst, who was in command of the whole Army, would have prevented a dreadful war that soon arose, but Amherst was hauty, independent and straight-laced. He despised red men. He discouraged his best officers from doing anything except to treat all the Indians as if they were inferior beings. After leaving Cleveland Pontiac did protect Major Rogers and his rangers as they came to Detroit, shielding them from the violence of Indians who had prepared to attack

them as they approached, but this was doubtless done to put all the English in that vicinity into a state of quietude and confidence.

Meanwhile the wary Chief was working out his plans. They were very simple,- as all good plans are,- not complicated and difficult for execution. His was a scheme to unite the Iroquois and all the tribes, villages and families of the Redmen in that vast domain to which I have referred; to so unite them that they would attack and destroy the nearest fort or garrison, all working and fighting at the same time. He succeeded with hundreds of them, but many of the Iroquois, almost all except the Senecas, were drawn away and made neutral by Sir William Johnson, whose influence with the Indians was as great as that of Pontiac himself. Sir William had married an Indian wife and usually lived with the Indians, and was the precise opposite in every respect to General Jeffreys Amherst.

But Arthur asked; "What did Pontiac do to unite all these Indian tribes?"

He sent a tomahawk colored red, and a wampum belt of unusual length. It was about as broad as your hand and between two and three feet long. It was made up of sizeable beads, the white ones all dug out from the inside of the conches and the purple from the muscle shell. These beads were strung close together and woven so as to cover the whole surface of the belt. If a tribe, by the hand of its chief, took the belt and the tomahawk and accepted them, that tribe was pledged to the war. These significant messages were taken by swift runners and carried to the Indians near and far. Even the day was fixed for the universal massacre, the 7th of May, 1763.

(To be continued.)